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New York

President: Mr. Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Tribute to the memory of His Excellency Sir Charles Antrobus, late Governor General of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

The President: Before we begin this meeting, it is my sad duty to pay tribute to the memory of the late Governor General of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, His Excellency Sir Charles Antrobus, who passed away recently.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I request the representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to convey our condolences to the Government and the people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and to the bereaved family of His Excellency Sir Charles Antrobus.

I invite representatives to stand and observe a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of His Excellency Sir Charles Antrobus.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silence.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Mrs. Ferrari (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): Mr. President, on behalf of the Government and people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, I would like to thank you and the General Assembly for honouring and respecting our late Head of State by observing one minute's silence.

Sir Charles James Antrobus GCMG, OBE, died on 3 June 2002 at the age of 69. After a successful and distinguished career in the private sector, he was appointed Governor General in 1997 by then Prime Minister Sir James Mitchell. Sir Charles adorned the office of head of State with grace, dignity and humility. When the Government changed in March last year, it is significant that the new administration recognized that Sir Charles was the ideal head of State and was more than content to have him continue in that role.

Our late beloved head of State walked with kings but always retained his common touch and his humanity. Last Monday, 10 June, he was laid to rest after a State funeral at which I had the honour to be present. The funeral was attended by numerous heads of State and dignitaries from around the world, but also by thousands of ordinary citizens, testament to the love and respect which the people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines had for the Governor General.

Sir Charles leaves to mourn his wife, Lady Gloria, and three children. He will be sadly missed by his family, his friends and the people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. May he rest in peace.

Agenda item 12 (*continued*)

Report of the Economic and Social Council

Meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies for development

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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The President: The General Assembly, pursuant to resolution 56/258 of 31 January 2002, will hold the first plenary meeting of the Meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies for development.

Also pursuant to resolution 56/258, informal panels will be held in parallel to the plenary meetings. In that connection, I should like to remind members that, as announced in the Journal today, the first informal panel will be held this afternoon from 3 to 6 p.m. in the Economic and Social Council Chamber. The second informal panel will be held tomorrow, Tuesday, 18 June, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Conference Room 4.

I should also like to inform members that Mr. Abdul Mejid Hussein, Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations, will chair the first informal panel. Mr. Jean-David Levitte, Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, will chair the second informal panel.

I propose that at the concluding plenary meeting, to be held tomorrow afternoon, the chairmen of the two informal panels present a summary of the discussions held in their respective panels.

I hear no objection; it is so decided.

Statement by the President

The President: It is my distinct pleasure and honour to preside over this meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies for development. The development of information and communication technologies (ICT) is the major trend driving the process of globalization, which, in turn, is shaping the knowledge-based economy of the twenty-first century.

The ICT revolution is creating new opportunities for economic growth and social development. ICT can make a tangible difference in the lives of hundreds of millions of people around the globe through their empowerment and thus enable them to take full advantage of the globalized world economy. New advances in the fields of ICT are further enhancing the already immense potential for dramatically accelerating development through "leap-frogging" stages of technological development.

ICT can contribute to the empowerment of women, to the reduction of gender inequalities and to the active participation of disabled and elderly persons in socio-economic life and development. It can bridge the distance between rural and urban populations and can significantly strengthen the global fight against diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria, to name just a few of its potential benefits.

However, we are faced by the sad reality that this immense potential of ICT is not being adequately harnessed currently. The digital divide threatens to further marginalize the economies and peoples of the developing countries as well as of countries with economies in transition. Moreover, given the very dynamism of the ICT revolution, every day that passes without effective action further widens the divide, making the need for concerted effort by the international community a matter of utmost urgency.

At the United Nations, the urgent necessity to put the potential of ICT at the service of development for all was recognized and reflected in a number of important intergovernmental documents, in particular the ministerial declaration of the Economic and Social Council in 2000, and was subsequently endorsed by the Millennium Summit. I think we all agree that political leadership and commitment at the highest level are necessary in order to integrate ICT for development programmes into national development strategies, to create a supportive regulatory and legal environment and to build an effective matrix of international cooperation.

The full and early realization of the potential of ICT for development at the global level requires more than just coherence and leadership at the national level; it needs a broad international commitment of political leaders to act in concert, on the basis of genuine mutual interest and partnership, in building a global environment in which ICT can be made to work to promote development for all. I would like to stress that the role of the United Nations is indispensable in this.

In this regard, I am particularly grateful to His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal, for his full commitment to ICT development and his graciousness in being present at this meeting despite his pressing schedule. President Wade's speech, reflecting his vast experiences and leadership to promote ICT cooperation at both the regional and global levels, will enlighten us and set the tone for the meeting in discussing how to enhance the

role of the United Nations in employing ICT for development.

In order to ensure the effectiveness of ICT-for-development activities at the national or international level, we also must bring all relevant stakeholders together. In particular, the effective and sustainable involvement of the private sector is vital. Indeed, the private sector must play a critical role in ICT development efforts; it is an essential source of technological innovation that generates economic growth, employment and wealth creation. The private sector also has the financial and technological wherewithal to make a substantial contribution to ICT for development by forging partnerships with the public sector at both the national and international levels.

The United Nations is in a unique position to promote effectively the involvement of the private sector and of public-private partnerships to address the digital divide. A major recent practical step aimed at strengthening the United Nations system's role in bridging the digital divide, in particular by promoting involvement of all relevant stakeholders, was the establishment of the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force. The Assembly will hear from its Chairman shortly. I wish to say only that we strongly believe that the Task Force, working in close cooperation with other multilateral initiatives, will be able to make an important contribution to strengthening the role of the United Nations in promoting ICT for development.

I also welcome the very valuable contribution made by the G-8 Digital Opportunities Task Force (DOT Force), set up at the Okinawa summit, and by the Genoa Plan of Action in raising awareness, in linking networks and in promoting multistakeholder initiatives. We shall also hear from the Chairman of the DOT Force at this Meeting. There has been a great deal of collaboration between those two key initiatives, which is indeed welcome.

Against the background of all the issues that I have mentioned and the many initiatives that address those issues, I see the task of this Meeting of the General Assembly and its unique value added as raising the political profile and awareness; mobilizing further support from all key partners; building on the work of the Economic and Social Council, of the United Nations ICT Task Force and of the G-8 DOT Force within an overall, comprehensive approach; and addressing the core issues in a broader context.

The General Assembly is the most universal and representative forum for evolving a meaningful, action-oriented and coordinated response by the international community to the global challenge of ICT in the service of development and thus for helping to achieve the goals of the Millennium Declaration. Our Meeting can also make a significant contribution to preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society, which is to be convened in 2003 in Switzerland and in 2005 in Tunisia. We look forward to hearing from Mr. Yoshio Utsumi, Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union, who will brief us on the Summit preparations this morning.

We have serious work ahead of us during these two days. We can make a tangible difference in the lives of people all around the globe by making our deliberations realistic and action-oriented. Our discussions should be based on genuine commonality of the interests of all stakeholders, governmental and non-governmental, who by combining their efforts can successfully bridge the digital divide.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, and President Wade, on your very timely initiative in holding this important Meeting. I would like to thank His Excellency the President of Senegal, whose country is in charge of information and communication technologies (ICT) initiatives in the New Partnership for Africa's Development, for coming to New York to attend this meeting.

(*spoke in French*)

Your presence here, Mr. President, shows your determination, and that of Africa, to take part in the many possibilities offered by the digital revolution for the development of the continent.

(*spoke in English*)

Indeed, over the last few years, a wide consensus has emerged on the potential of information and communication technology to promote economic growth, combat poverty and facilitate the integration of developing countries into a global economy. Seizing the opportunities offered by the digital revolution is one of the most pressing challenges we face.

A great deal of work has already been done. The high-level panel of experts that the General Assembly asked me to convene three years ago has produced solid proposals and recommendations, some of which have already been implemented. The United Nations ICT Task Force, which I established last year at the request of the Economic and Social Council, is becoming a key forum for discussions on policy and, particularly, on how ICT can help to achieve the Millennium Development goals. It is also becoming a platform for forging partnerships among different stakeholders, and it is building bridges to other similar initiatives — especially, as we heard from the President of the General Assembly, the DOT Force, created by the Group of Eight (G-8) in July 2000. The Task Force itself embodies an open, inclusive approach by bringing together Government officials, non-governmental organizations, experts and the private sector.

Yet, despite commendable efforts and various initiatives, we are still very far from ensuring that the benefits of ICT are available to all. The digital divide still yawns as widely as ever, with billions of people still unconnected to a global society which, on its side, is more and more wired. Why should this be so? Allow me to make two observations which, I hope, will help this Meeting reflect on new and more effective policy approaches.

First, our efforts must be based on the real needs of those we are seeking to help. They must be fully and genuinely involved. This has proved to be more easily said than done. In particular, we must find better ways to ensure the participation of developing countries at all stages.

Secondly, our effort must be sustained over the long term. In recent years, we have witnessed a number of very promising initiatives that, regrettably, did not live up to expectations. The reasons were diverse, but one of the principal causes was insufficient long-term commitment on the part of initiators and sponsors. There is a clear lesson here for our Task Force and for other initiatives. To be effective over time, they need to be nurtured by stakeholders, supported by continued involvement and, last but not least, provided with adequate resources over the long term.

There is a real need for the many initiatives to come together, united by a common purpose and common determination. I trust that this Meeting will advance us along this route. Everyone — Governments, civil society, the private sector — has a vital stake in fostering digital opportunity and putting ICT at the service of development. I wish the Assembly a fruitful Meeting and look forward to the results of its debate.

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Senegal.

Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Wade: Let me first express once again my heartfelt gratitude for the great honour bestowed on Senegal by the President of the General Assembly's kind decision to invite me as the keynote speaker of the General Assembly Meeting on information and communications technologies for development.

I feel all the more flattered because this invitation comes from a man of vision and commitment whose outstanding qualities as a seasoned statesman, dedicated parliamentarian and bright academic have greatly benefited the work of the General Assembly during this session.

Indeed, your achievements, Sir, are no surprise to me. As an eminent citizen of the Republic of Korea, you belong to a proud nation of true achievers who have been able, within a generation, to leapfrog decades of underdevelopment to become one of the top economies in the world.

(*spoke in French*)

I should like to thank you most warmly, Mr. President, for your commendable initiative. I should like also to pay a sincere tribute to your, and our, Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, as well as to President José María Figueres-Olsen, former head of State of Costa Rica and an outstanding figure in the development of digital technology in his country, for the decisive role they have played in the establishment and development of the study group on information and communication technologies.

The initiative of holding this meeting came from the South, which is suffering from the effects of the

"digital divide". As New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) coordinator for this extremely significant aspect of our development strategy, I am fully aware of the timeliness and the relevance of our Meeting. That is why I am particularly honoured by this invitation to address the community of nations as the keynote speaker on this subject.

The tremendous stakes involved in new information and communication technologies, which today are decisive for the progress of nations, are the reason why the New Partnership for the Development of Africa — which was adopted July last at Lusaka, at the thirty-sixth summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and entitled "The New African Initiative" — has made this sector one of its principal priorities.

I should like to recall that NEPAD is based on several fundamental pillars, namely, good governance; the region as a basis for development, rather than the State; and, finally, heavy reliance on the private sector.

NEPAD has chosen eight priority sectors: infrastructure, education, health care, agriculture, new information and communication technologies, energy, the environment, and market access, with the diversification of agricultural products.

Backing our appeal, Cisco, Hewlett-Packard, Microsoft, Tiscali and other titans in the new technologies sector all were heavily represented last April in Dakar at the Conference on Partnership with the Private Sector for Africa's Development, and they made clear their desire to assist Africa in its fascinating new technological adventure.

I should therefore like to recall here a few practical measures for which Africa, in the conclusions and resolutions of Dakar, requests the support of the international community. These include the establishment of Internet networks, thereby making possible the transmission of audio and visual information among the Governments of the region, or, indeed, those of the entire continent. And why not hold digital African conferences?

Other measures include harmonizing the regulatory framework for the telecommunications sector, at least in each of the regions, to facilitate foreign investment; the digitalization of Africa's cultural heritage, in particular through the production of CD-ROMs on the history of the Africa. This project, which is particularly important to me, is now being implemented in Senegal.

Another measure is the establishment of a pan-African "e-store" for trade and exchange in African products — crafts in particular — and to make e-trade the driving force for economic growth; the creation of industrial units for the production of information and telecommunications equipment; and, finally, the establishment of a global fund for information and communication technologies to assist Africa in overcoming the digital divide that separates it from the developed world.

Moreover, Africa's backwardness in this area, far from being inevitable, is now being dealt with and is on the way to being eliminated, for the struggle is well under way, as I am gratified to note. Efforts to this end are now being made to bring about this new planetary citizenship — the digital revolution.

Indeed, the entirely new system of underwater fibre-optic communication, which I launched in Senegal 28 May last, which links Europe, Africa and Asia over 28,000 kilometres, shows that our continent is indeed well on its way towards digital emancipation, since this system allows Africa to be connected, with full autonomy and at a lesser cost, to the global network.

The use of underwater digital cable de facto eliminates expensive travel through major urban centres outside the continent. It ensures autonomy, reduced costs and the linkage of users to the rest of the world. As you are aware, many African countries depend on certain European capitals to communicate even among themselves.

This technological marvel — which we inaugurated recently, was implemented in a relatively short time, several months, thanks to the involvement of companies from the South and the North — represents a specific example of new technology projects which NEPAD is striving to promote through private partnerships.

Indeed, if Africans had the same favourable conditions as other peoples, there is no question that they have all of the necessary intellectual resources to meet the challenge of an information and communication society. It is on the basis of this belief that I have decided to embark firmly on a bold policy

of development of new information and communication technology in Senegal.

I recently launched a large-scale project — Cyberville — a technological park on the outskirts of Dakar with a highly competitive telecommunications infrastructure. It is designed to host major companies working in the area of new technologies and the future start-ups of outstanding young Africans who wish to be active participants in the new economy. Here again, this is a project that was launched by the public authorities but that has become a private one, involving the private sector in Senegal and the American private sector.

The time has come for Africa to make full use of its human resources by taking advantage of the enormous potential of e-business, the spread of digital technology and the development of information technology solutions. Asian countries have succeeded in this, and they too started from circumstances similar to ours. I am therefore convinced that this can be achieved very quickly.

For its part, Senegal has had a successful initial experiment with distance medicine, which was repeated last week. Doctors in Dakar assessed via satellite the pregnancies of 60 women living in the most remote and cut-off areas of the country. Again, that took place just 72 hours ago. For these people, seeing a baby sucking its thumb in its mother's womb and understanding that abusing the mother means brutalizing the child represent a genuine social and cultural revolution. Indeed, we saw people holding their heads in their hands in astonishment.

We have had similar success in the education sector, where Microsoft has provided public schools with a free introductory programme in computing. The day care centres established under the La Case des Tout-Petits programme — my pet project — train children between the ages of 2 and 6 using modern educational games — which remain a privilege of children in developed countries. These centres use computer games to make inroads into the world of computing. This project has been adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a Universal Project.

Our planned university of the African future — a university without borders to which one does not have to travel — will provide complete, real time and carefully chosen Western university programmes via satellite. Through this programme, students will no longer have to go abroad, as their degrees will be absolutely identical — not just "equivalent" — to those issued by universities affiliated with the programme. Technological Senegal therefore wishes to gain access to the information highway instead of remaining on the periphery of the achievements of the new millennium.

There is no doubt that the new technologies suggest a higher form of democracy in which everyone moves forward at the same speed: the speed of the electron or, if you will, of the speed of light. But such democracy, accessible to all with the intelligence that is the gift of nature, can only become a reality if everyone has an opportunity to be a player in the interaction of its forces.

Our desire is shared in Africa today through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the projects we shall be submitting to the Group of Eight as part of our partnership with the Western world which, I would like to recall, is both a public and private partnership. Among other things, Africa is indeed giving pride of place to new information and communication technologies. We have in store numerous projects that must be supported by the public sector, but which must also be a matter for the private sector. Our partnership must therefore have the goal of providing opportunities to every country and to every man and woman. To that end, our eyes should be on the enormous international differences in computer ownership. We must strive with resolve to achieve widespread access to information and communication networks.

In conclusion, I would like to make a solemn appeal to all partners: Governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, international institutions, scientific circles and all active participants in this fascinating adventure. I urge them to join their efforts with ours and with those of the international community and the Secretary-General, who has been able to endow our institutions with a soul. Nations have become scientific laboratories backed by political decisions. That is the reason why we are gradually seeing a very deep-rooted change in how these institutions are viewed throughout the world, including in Africa.

Now, we are addressing the colossal challenges posed by the digital revolution that Africa aspires to join — a continent that is standing proud because it is

able to continue to assume with dignity its role in the community of nations.

(*spoke in English*)

Bearing that in mind, I would like to join the Assembly in a toast to an enhanced partnership between the United Nations and Africa towards the full realization of the NEPAD programme, and to a fruitful meeting of the Assembly on information and communication technologies for development.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Senegal for the statement he has just made.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 56/281, of 1 May 2002, I now give the floor to the President of the Economic and Social Council, His Excellency Mr. Ivan Šimonović.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia), President of the Economic and Social Council: The need for technology transfer and better access to knowledge is well documented and clear. Although knowledge and technological development are among the critical factors of economic growth and sustainable development, there is considerable concentration of knowledge, and the technologies deriving from it, in a limited number of countries. The majority of the world's population still lives in poverty and has not yet reaped the full benefits of the revolution in information and communication technologies (ICT).

The issue of ICT is not merely about the progress of information technologies. It is about structural changes happening in society as a result of such progress and, most important, the impact of those changes on people. Regardless of where we live or how we live, today, due to the process of globalization, we are influenced by the information society. Yet we are not always able to reap its benefit regionally, nationally and locally. ICT can be a powerful tool for human resources development everywhere, as will be underscored as part of the human resources development theme during the Economic and Social Council's high-level segment starting next month. The impact of ICT on jobs, health, education, commerce and much more should be beneficial to everyone. ICT is a tremendously powerful tool for helping to advance the development goals of the Millennium Declaration and of international conferences, and in overcoming disparities in development. This potential must be put to better use.

In recent years, the Economic and Social Council has accorded the highest priority to bridging the digital divide. In 2000, it adopted a major Ministerial Declaration (see E/2000/L.9) on the role of ICT in development. The Declaration proposed a range of initiatives for fostering digital opportunities. It stressed that information and communication technologies can play an important role in accelerating growth, promoting sustainable development and eradicating poverty in developing countries, and can facilitate their effective integration into the global economy. The Economic and Social Council, as a catalyst in bringing together all actors in advancing common goals for poverty eradication and development, has a clear role in integrating ICT into economic, social and environment aspects of development.

The Ministerial Declaration also called on the United Nations system and the Economic and Social Council to play a key role in promoting coherence of all efforts to expand the development impact of ICT. In response to this call, the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force was created by the Secretary-General, as he has just reminded us.

The establishment of the United Nations ICT Task Force enhanced collaboration within the United Nations system. It gave impetus to a wealth of collaborative efforts on the part of Governments, multilateral institutions, donors, the private sector, civil society and other relevant stakeholders to enhance the development impact of ICT. From the point of view of the Economic and Social Council, the Task Force was a pioneer effort. It was the first time the Council had launched such a broad-based endeavour, involving not only the United Nations system, but also Governments and the private sector, in a sustained pursuit of development goals. We will build on this experience as we take steps to further increase the impact of the Council's work. The Economic and Social Council is committed to helping the international community to address the challenge of the digital divide.

Last year, during its coordination segment, the Council further advanced the work started by the Ministerial Declaration. It reviewed the role of the United Nations in promoting access to knowledge and technology, including through partnerships. One major

contribution of the Economic and Social Council is to mobilize and coordinate the efforts of United Nations organizations in continuing to help countries to incorporate ICT and to establish ICT-specific policies towards advancing national and regional development. To this end, the Council helps agencies, funds and programmes to maintain their focus on these goals. It will keep ICT high on its agenda and will closely follow the work of the United Nations ICT Task Force.

Furthermore, many international, regional and local organizations and their partners are assisting developing countries to cope with challenges arising from the rapid progress of ICT. While many of these activities are the result of the collaborative efforts of multiple stakeholders, it is important that all parties be aware of the work of others so that every effort leads to efficient implementation and best results. In this regard, a coordination role by the Economic and Social Council is essential.

Partnership and collaboration among all stakeholders is increasingly regarded as a critical element for the achievement of development goals. For example, partnership was carried to an unprecedented level at the International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Monterrey. There, the Economic and Social Council was asked to help ensure that international organizations, civil society and the private sector stay engaged in the follow-up process.

I am confident that the World Summit for Sustainable Development will now bring the sustainability dimension of development to the focus of our international agenda. It will provide a powerful new platform for launching partnership efforts to achieve more balanced development, in which ICT should be given an important role.

Finally, the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in 2003 and in 2005, will provide a major opportunity to discuss further actions needed to bridge the digital divide and to use the full potential of ICT to reach Millennium Goals.

Knowledge is a key to development. As we speak, technology — especially ICT — is making rapid progress, while leaving the question of disparities in development unresolved. I would like to assure the Assembly that the Economic and Social Council is committed to helping the international community to address this challenge. The guiding principle of our efforts should be that development for all presupposes knowledge for all and ICT for all, without any discrimination.

I wish this meeting every success.

The President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 56/281 of 1 May 2002, I now give the floor to the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union, Mr. Yoshio Utsumi.

Mr. Utsumi (International Telecommunication Union): It is a great honour for the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to be invited to make a statement at a meeting of the General Assembly.

A wave of change is sweeping through the world that has come to be known as the "information society". Two years ago, people were very worried about the Y2K bug. It was feared that if computers stopped operating properly, all telecommunications would cease, trains would stop, aeroplanes might crash, people would not be able to withdraw money from their bank accounts, and so forth, and catastrophe would be inevitable. Fortunately, that did not happen, thanks to our careful planning and precautions. The ITU worked hard to tackle the problem.

The advantages and benefits that information and communication technologies (ICT) can bring in educational, commercial, medical and governmental activities are too numerous to mention; they are making the global village a reality. Yet many of the world's inhabitants are still excluded. Let us take as an example the telephone. Some 83 countries still have a teledensity below 10 lines for every 100 inhabitants; 25 countries still have a teledensity below 1 per cent. The situation is even worse with regard to Internet access. Some 61 countries have less than one Internet user for every 100 citizens.

Furthermore, services are often prohibitive to use due to high prices. A telephone call from Geneva to the United States costs less than 5 cents a minute — by using the newest technologies, it costs the same as a call to neighbouring cities in France. A call from Geneva to many parts of Africa, however, costs more than $1 per minute — 20 times as much. If the price came down, African citizens would be better able to join the world. That is a reality.

In the days of our parents, it was a luxury to have a telephone at home. But in today's world, telecommunications is a necessity. Without it, we cannot work efficiently, we cannot be part of the

modern world and we cannot participate in the benefits of a prosperous economic life. Of course, people cannot live on information alone, but it is quite obvious that, for better or for worse, human beings are now entering an age in which information-oriented activities are a major part of gross domestic product. Information is a key to competitive advantage, for both businesses and modern States.

Therefore, it becomes all the more urgent to build a basic telecommunication infrastructure in order to develop capable human resources and to make the best use of information technologies in every aspect of human activity. We must extend the benefits of information and telecommunication technologies to every citizen in the world. We must bridge the digital divide and turn it into a digital opportunity.

This, in fact, is the specific mandate of the International Telecommunication Union, which is the United Nations specialized agency responsible for telecommunications. Since its establishment in 1865, the Union has been working hard to achieve precisely that goal.

An earlier stage of economic development was the passing from an agricultural economy to an industrial one. If all countries must follow the same stages of development, the developing world would never close the gap. However, many recognize that information communication technologies may help countries to leapfrog the development process by moving directly to an information-driven society, assuming they take the proper steps. To build an information-oriented society, we do not necessarily require the preconditions that helped to create the industrial revolution, such as accumulation of wealth and the facilities for mass production. What we need today is creative individuals and a comparatively smaller investment in the information communication technologies (ICT) infrastructure. Today anyone can work and provide a product to the global market, even from a remote corner of the world, if the means of communication are readily and cheaply available.

In the information society, most of the actual work is carried out by individuals, using computers and networks, so that the power of economies of scale loses relevance. A complex distribution system, or many layers of middlemen, or a rigid hierarchical structure, would be useless — even an obstacle. Therefore, on the threshold of the information society, the developed and the developing worlds are standing at the same starting point.

There are already many success stories showing how to make the best use of information and communication technologies for development. These include the software industries of Israel, of Bangalore in India, of the Asian hubs of Hong Kong and Singapore, or even of a small mountain village of Peru that has succeeded in selling its agricultural produce to New York by e-commerce and has raised household incomes fivefold in the process.

The transformation to the information society will be every bit as profound as the movement from an agrarian to an industrial society. In the past, such changes led to winners and losers. Some countries have prospered, while others have fallen behind. It could happen again, and if we do not take any action now, existing gaps could widen. No, we must not make the same mistakes for the coming information society. By making the right decisions, world leaders must shape the direction of the information society and create a more just, prosperous and peaceful world. It will not be an easy task, but I am confident that we can work together to ensure that political leaders have a proper understanding of the information society and to establish a global strategy to create a win-win situation. This is the objective of the upcoming World Summit on the Information Society.

One example of a win-win situation may be that of establishing a competitive market for ICT. This will create new business opportunities for the developed world to sell their products and services. At the same time, higher penetration of ICT will enable the developing world to jump ahead to an information-oriented economy. Therefore, the creation of a competitive market for ICT should be pursued as a global strategy. There will be many other issues that will benefit both the developed and the developing world as a result of creating the information society.

To create a win-win situation at the Summit, it will first be necessary to elaborate a vision of the information society that will bring its positive benefits to us all. Secondly, the Summit should draw up a clear, concrete action plan for improving access to ICT that can be implemented by all stakeholders. Thirdly, the Summit should look beyond technology and focus on applications. The real goal is not to get more computers or more telephones, but rather to extend access to

information, to guarantee the right to communicate, and to focus on how ICT can be used to achieve broader social and economic goals, such as the eradication of poverty.

In order for the Summit to be a milestone in the information society, there must be a true meeting of minds, bringing together all stakeholders, from both the developed and the developing worlds. It must provide a unique opportunity for heads of State, United Nations agencies, regulators, industry leaders, non-governmental organizations and civil society to gather together and discuss all relevant issues in the information society.

It will not be an easy task to form a win-win situation for all. But I am confident that we can work together to make the Summit a success and ensure that the information society ushers in a world where information and communication technologies benefit all the world's inhabitants, help to eradicate poverty and create a more just, prosperous and peaceful world.

The President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 56/281 of 1 May 2002, I now give the floor to the Chairman of the Information and Communication Technologies Task Force, Mr. José María Figueres Olsen.

Mr. Figueres Olsen (Chairman of the Information and Communication Technologies Task Force): Mr. President, thank you for your leadership in devoting these meetings of the General Assembly to the very important and relevant topic of information technologies. Your country, the Republic of Korea, has certainly led the way in productivity, including broadband access for over 70 per cent of your country's households. And I thank President Wade of Senegal for leading the information and communication technologies (ICT) revolution within your country and, specifically, the ICT programme within the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) initiative.

Ten years ago, the West emerged from the cold war with a sense of victory and of its own invincibility, feeling that the war had been won. In reality, as the Millennium Declaration points out, the real war, the war for development, was only about to begin. If the fall of the wall at that time heralded an era of greater opportunities, the fall of the towers a short distance from here brought us a new sense of vulnerability. But with it came an opportunity to refocus our attention on the critical challenge we face today.

Through the global transformation, depending on our actions — or our lack of action — we have the possibility of advancing in the direction of the dream of a culturally rich, inclusive and sustainable world civilization but also, on the contrary, of moving in the direction of the nightmare of an impoverished, meaner and more destructive and fragmented world. All of us present here and millions around the world would, of course, rather move in the first direction. But the various pressures on the global system of today make that a much greater challenge.

Let me mention just a couple of those pressures. First, the evolution of globalization at differing speeds within nations and among nations is causing a sense of exclusion among many citizens of the world, not only in the developing nations but also within pockets of the developed nations. It is a sense not only of economic exclusion but also of a lack of political inclusion — creating the second challenge. It is that seeming lack of political representation that so many of the citizens of the world feel today. It is a lack of representation not only of peoples but also with respect to certain issues, and the third source of pressure on the global system is that markets fail to address properly what we call the common good: things of essential benefit to us all. For example, are we really addressing on a global scale the common good of the environment? Are we really addressing the issue of that common good with all the courage and proactiveness that we should employ? Thus, the fourth pressure on the global system is the seeming inadequacy of much of the world's institutional framework today in addressing our most pressing challenges.

Against that backdrop of difficulties and challenges, we have the Millennium Declaration, which reminds us of the very important challenges lying ahead. Let me reiterate just some of them — with which all are so familiar: halving the number of people who live on less than one dollar a day; providing education to children throughout the world; and enabling all people on the planet to benefit from new technologies.

We are now one seventh of the way to the date by which we agreed we should be able to achieve the Millennium goals. I submit with all due respect that in order to enhance our chances of achieving those goals,

we require a new approach due to the complex challenges and the interdependency of the issues that we face. As well, we must mainstream ICT in every one of our development efforts. To go into greater detail, such a new approach requires the collaboration of all world leaders, representing all segments of society, in addressing those global issues. More than ever, we need relevant intergovernmental organizations that can adequately transform themselves to respond to the challenges of the day. We need good, working public institutions within countries to tackle the many issues at hand. We need the thorough engagement of the private sector and a growing sense of corporate global citizenship and responsibility.

As President Wade knows so well, we have just come back from the Africa Economic Summit of the World Economic Forum, where more than 150 corporations endorsed the New Partnership for Africa's Development. Today at the United Nations, we will be discussing over lunch the CEO Charter for Digital Development, a voluntary commitment by global corporations to dedicating at least 20 per cent of their corporate social responsibility investment to ICT. Besides such private sector efforts, we also need civil society not only to identify the issues to be tackled but also to engage in solving some of them.

A true multi-stakeholder network effort, enhanced by the deployment of ICT is exactly what the Secretary-General envisioned when he established the ICT Task Force under the mandate of the Economic and Social Council. The Task Force is a collaborative effort of the public and private sectors. Many representatives of the private sector and, of course, of civil society are here today. The Task Force has four very clear objectives: to be a role model in advocacy and in creating awareness; to put the mainstreaming of ICT in development on the political agenda; to develop and to help promote national e-strategies; to assume responsibility in helping human and institutional capacity-building for mainstreaming ICT in different parts of the world; and to assist in mobilizing new resources. That would take us in the very positive direction of achieving a greater degree of sustainable development with a good, proper, sound macroeconomic balance, closely linked to strategic human development and environmental proactiveness. We can do that if we mainstream ICT in our development proposals and if we finance that mainstreaming mainly through direct foreign investment. That would put us on the path towards a "virtuous" circle, in which strengthening democratic values would lead to good governance and to institutions that work better. That in turn would help us to create better, transparent and clear regulatory frameworks within which we can generate better conditions for transforming development proposals into market opportunities — making a market opportunity out of development and leveraging all resources at hand to create a much better world.

In the meantime, as we make progress on that, perhaps we can continue to work with the Assembly on some smaller things such as changing some of the rules that have regulated the General Assembly for the past 50 years, which do not allow a *PowerPoint* presentation — which meant I had to read from my presentation instead of being able to share it directly.

The President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 56/281 of 1 May 2002, I now give the floor to the Chairman of the Digital Opportunities Task Force and Deputy Minister for Industry of Canada, Mr. Peter Harder.

Mr. Harder (Digital Opportunity Task Force): I am honoured to take part in this meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies (ICT) for development. In my remarks, I would like to illustrate briefly the importance of ICT as a catalyst for social and economic transformation and how the Group of Eight (G-8) Digital Opportunity Task Force (DOT Force), in partnership with other international organizations, is addressing this tremendous opportunity for global development.

In today's environment, basic access to knowledge and information is becoming a prerequisite for modern human development. In that context, ICT is increasingly being recognized as much more than just a key economic sector; it is also being seen as a vital enabling tool for economic modernization and as a vehicle for social, cultural and civic enrichment.

Indeed, the debate on the importance of ICT for development has shifted away from the "either/or" dilemma. We should no longer need to ask ourselves whether it is more important to give citizens better access to computers or to antibiotics, or whether it is more important to focus on upgrading ICT infrastructures than to improve the delivery of safe drinking water. Far from competing with such policy objectives, ICT provides a powerful instrument to help

achieve them. In that context, ICT is instrumental in achieving the development goals set out by the United Nations at the 2000 Millennium Summit.

There are many real-life examples of how ICT is key to enabling societies to promote sustainable growth, to advancing social justice and to strengthening democratic governance. For instance, community radio stations in Africa are providing vital information on weather disaster warnings, on health and nutrition and on HIV/AIDS prevention. The quality of life of many poor women in Bangladesh has improved through the innovative use of cellular telephones. In Bolivia, Internet centres have been set up to provide farmers with timely information on crops, transformation and production, as well as on policies and regulations.

Unfortunately, ICT for development is still underused in many parts of the world. Indeed, the digital gap between rich and poor countries has widened dramatically in the past several years. Unequal access to ICT is producing uneven levels of participation in the networked economy and society and resulting in the inability of many to share in its benefits. Those obstacles could deepen an enormous digital divide whereby billions of people could be left outside a globally connected world.

The challenge of transforming those divides into digital opportunities for all is complex and requires commitment and close cooperation among the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. The private sector — through innovation, risk taking and investment — has a key role in developing a country's ICT infrastructure. Governments, on the other hand, are entrusted with the mandate of providing a favourable policy and regulatory environment to ensure market fairness and flexibility and of exercising leadership through strategic investments in ICT applications and content. And civil society stakeholders complement those policy objectives by facilitating the integration of a truly inclusive information society to maximize its social, civic and community potential.

A global agenda is taking shape, as numerous international forums are now addressing the challenge and the opportunity of the digital divide. Let me now spend a few moments to describe one of these initiatives, the Digital Opportunity Task Force.

As set out in the Okinawa Charter on Global Information Society, adopted by the Group of Eight (G-8) Kyushu-Okinawa summit, held in Japan in July 2000, the DOT Force was mandated to identify concrete ways to bridge the digital divide between industrialized and developing countries, and to ensure that developing countries can fully participate in the global information society. Its membership includes stakeholders from G-8 and developing countries, the private and not-for-profit sectors and international organizations associated with that enterprise.

At the Genoa Summit, held last July, G-8 leaders endorsed the DOT Force report, entitled "Digital opportunities for all: Meeting the challenge", and its forward-looking Plan of Action, with nine priority areas as a basis for developing countries to achieve sustainable, ICT-enabled development, both economic and social. G-8 leaders also encouraged all stakeholders to build on their successful cooperation and to develop concrete initiatives to deliver on each of the nine elements of the Genoa Plan of Action.

As current Chair of the G-8, Canada will present the DOT Force report card to G-8 leaders next week in Kananaskis, Alberta. It will include concrete initiatives, developed by its implementation teams, that cover the following key areas: national e-strategies; access and connectivity; human capacity; entrepreneurship; global policy participation; ICT for health; and local content and applications.

The e-strategies implementation team is viewed as a cornerstone of the Plan of Action. Among the initiatives being developed by that team is an international e-development resource network. It will provide regulatory, policy and strategy expertise to developing country policy makers in areas such as e-strategies, e-government, telecommunications policy and regulation, Internet governance and electronic commerce.

Other concrete initiatives include: a public access telecentre help desk, for sharing knowledge targeted towards not-for-profit telecentre practitioners in the South with a social agenda for community development; a DOT Force entrepreneurship network, to support entrepreneurship through mentoring, incubating and seed funding to selected entrepreneurs in developing countries; an open knowledge network, to share knowledge in various languages at local, regional and international access points; and several other initiatives, which may be described in more detail during the panel discussions.

At the Genoa Summit, G-8 leaders were also joined by African leaders, who presented an initiative that we all now know as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). That initiative includes a comprehensive vision to meet the social, political and economic challenges faced by Africa's peoples, highlighting ICT as a priority area to help all African countries to achieve economic and social development. Through its various implementation teams, the DOT Force is targeting the specific needs expressed by African leaders through NEPAD, notably the needs of the least developed countries.

In preparation for the Kananaskis Summit, the DOT Force participants met recently in Calgary to address several goals: to prepare the report card to be presented to G-8 leaders on the efforts to implement the Genoa Plan of Action; to advance the implementation of several DOT Force initiatives; to contribute to meet several of the ICT objectives set out in NEPAD by African leaders; and to ensure future implementation of the DOT Force agenda through strategic linkages with the United Nations ICT Task Force and with other international groups. Next week, on 25 June, the DOT Force will present its report card to the media, and the Prime Minister of Canada will formally present the report card to G-8 leaders in Kananaskis and will discuss the role of ICT in support of the global development agenda.

The DOT Force's all-inclusive approach is now serving as a model for other ICT-for-development initiatives by other international organizations and by the private sector. For instance, the World Economic Forum's Global Digital Divide Initiative now includes Government and civil society participants at its meetings.

As the Assembly knows, in November 2001, the Secretary-General launched the United Nations ICT Task Force to provide a focal point for addressing the digital divide within the broader international community. As with the DOT Force, the ICT Task Force includes members from all segments of global society. Given its three-year mandate, its reliance on a permanent structure and its wider international reach, it is well positioned to build on the work and success of the DOT Force and to strengthen the coalition of forces committed to promoting the role of ICT in development.

We expect that the Task Force will continue: first, to mobilize political commitment, including a commitment to mainstream ICT in development assistance programmes; secondly, to promote policy coherence and coordination among international initiatives; and thirdly, to act as a catalyst in pulling resources together on key international initiatives.

The DOT Force's momentum will also be maintained through the formation of an informal DOT Force implementation network. The network will be used to share information and to maximize cooperation among the various DOT Force implementation teams. Each team will also decide how it wants to pursue its objectives and the degree to which it will engage in formal or informal cooperation with other interested parties or entities.

Events such as the World Summit on the Information Society, scheduled to take place in 2003 and 2005, will also represent excellent opportunities to benchmark and take stock of progress in broadening digital opportunities to every community around the world.

The DOT Force ceases to exist as a formal organization at the conclusion of the G-8 Summit in Kananaskis. I am confident, however, that, through the synergies and close cooperation established with the United Nations ICT Task Force and other international bodies, we will be able to keep the drive to ensure future implementation of the DOT Force agenda in the coming years.

If representatives can bear with me for a few minutes, I will now speak in my capacity as Canada's Deputy Minister of Industry to discuss briefly the fascinating things that we have done to address the digital divide in Canada and our contribution to improving the well-being of citizens globally.

When we start to analyse the issue of the digital divide, it quickly becomes evident that there is a strong correlation with other forms of socio-economic divides. For instance, a country, regardless of its level of development, faces the following set of digital divides.

It faces a divide between individuals: rich and poor, educated and non-educated, men and women, and young and old. It faces a business divide, that is, a divide between small businesses and large businesses. Small entrepreneurs, to a large extent, do not have the resources or the capacity to use new ICT tools to

improve their business and are at a commercial disadvantage with respect to larger corporations.

There is also a digital divide between regions, especially between rural and remote and urban regions. Lack of infrastructure, lack of skilled labour, and lack of venture capital make it difficult for rural regions to compete with urban cores. There is, in addition, a serious divide between countries. It has been well publicized, and several international initiatives, such as the United Nations ICT Force and the DOT Force, are already addressing this issue.

These digital divides are not mutually exclusive, and concerted action on one type of divide will, of course, have a positive impact on the other types. Government intervention in various spheres of social and economic policy is required to address these divides.

(*spoke in French*)

For the past several years, the Canadian Government has considered its Connectedness Agenda as a top priority to ensure that Canada becomes the most connected nation in the world. Canada's Connectedness Agenda has enabled us to provide computers for schools, connecting all schools and libraries across the country, as well as thousands of communities and volunteer organizations. The focus has truly been on connecting all Canadians, regardless of status, location or economic situation.

We also have a world-leading e-commerce policy framework in such areas as privacy and security, consumer protection and taxation issues. Special attention has been paid to helping the least developed countries to use e-commerce to support connections with major corporations. We have the world's fastest national Internet system for research, and we continue to innovate, with the establishment of 12 "smart communities" across the country and the online delivery of all Government services.

(*spoke in English*)

But as we are all aware, the Information Revolution is moving faster. What were ambitious targets only a few years ago are no longer adequate to ensure Canada's success in the twenty-first century.

To reach our goals for an innovative and inclusive society in the Network Age, a public-private partnership is required on several fronts. Each of the three pillars — infrastructure, use and content — must be addressed to ensure digital opportunities for all.

We are aiming to upgrade our infrastructure to "next-generation" broadband technologies. We are aiming to accelerate use by businesses, particularly small businesses, communities, individuals and Government. With respect to content, we are aiming to increase the development of Canadian content, local content applications, services and products.

Canada's commitment to promote digital opportunity is not limited by its own borders but is truly global. Through many channels, we are sharing our domestic experience and expertise with other countries and are actively participating in building a comprehensive international strategy and action plan to help developing nations bridge the digital divide. Multilateral cooperation by Governments, the private sector, civil society and international and regional organizations is vital in building this strategy.

For instance, at the Summit of the Americas, held in Québec City last year, Canada announced a $20 million contribution to establish an Institute for Connectivity in the Americas. The Institute is implementing a work programme that is clearly demand-driven and aimed at sharing knowledge and expertise on new approaches to use ICTs for community development and delivery of Government services in areas such as health and education.

Canada is also very active in helping to design and implement connectivity initiatives in other parts of the world. The International Development Research Centre is rolling out its ACACIA Phase II programme in Africa, a very successful programme aimed at supporting African-led initiatives in policy research, regulatory frameworks, development and assessment of community-based services, and applications. The Canadian International Development Agency, an organization very well known to most of those present, I am sure, and the Canadian Department of Industry also have been very active in supporting connectivity initiatives in many countries, whether it is for connecting schools and libraries, for supporting small businesses, or for putting Government services online.

Finally, in international forums, Canada is promoting policy and regulatory frameworks that are inclusive and integrate the specific needs of developing countries. A recent example is our interventions

promoting a global policy framework for e-commerce for the benefit of all countries.

In conclusion, I should like to emphasize once again that ICTs are a strategic tool for achieving global development objectives and that Canada is truly committed to supporting international efforts to turn digital divides into digital opportunities. To do so, we all need to "mainstream" ICTs in our development agenda.

The President: Before proceeding further, I should like to inform members that, in a letter dated 10 May 2002 addressed to me, the Permanent Representative of Monaco to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and Other States for the month of May, requested that the General Assembly hear in plenary meeting of the Meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies for development a statement by the Observer of Switzerland. Taking into account the importance attached to the issue under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly should take a decision on this request.

May I take it that there is no objection to the proposal to hear the observer of the Holy See in plenary meeting of the Meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies for development?

It was so decided.

The President: I should also like to inform members that, in a letter dated 7 June 2002 addressed to me, the Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States for the month of June, requests that the General Assembly hear in plenary meeting of the Meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies for development, a statement by the observer of the Holy See.

Taking into account the importance attached to the issue under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly should take a decision on that request.

May I take it that there is no objection to the proposal to hear the observer of the Holy See in plenary meeting of the Meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies for development?

It is so decided.

The President: Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I should like to propose that the list of speakers for the Meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies for development be closed at 1 p.m. today. May I take it that there is no objection to this proposal?

It was so decided.

The President: I therefore request those representatives wishing to participate in the meetings to inscribe themselves as soon as possible, before 1 p.m. today.

I should also like to draw the attention of members to the matter of the length of statements. As members are aware, there is a large number of speakers on the list — at least 55 at this stage. The fact remains that we have a very limited number of plenary meetings to hear all the speakers for this Meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies for development. Therefore, I should like to request that members try honestly to make their statements as concise as possible — not exceeding 10 minutes, at any rate — in consideration of other delegations, so that all the speakers can be accommodated within these plenary meetings. I again thank members for their understanding and cooperation.

I now give the floor to the representative of Venezuela, His Excellency Mr. Rudolf Römer, Vice-Minister for Science and Technology, who will speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Mr. Römer (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, I would like, first at all, to express our satisfaction with this timely Meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies (ICT) for development. We hope that during this special meeting we will be able to have a productive and useful exchange of views that will lead to future agreements that have political will, commonality of approach and universality of involvement with regard to this issue of such importance to the developing world.

In the Declaration of the South Summit, which was held in Havana from 10 to 14 April 2000, the

heads of State and Government of the member countries of the G77 and China indicated that today, more than ever, rapidly advancing scientific and technological developments, particularly in areas such as microelectronics, biotechnology and information technology, have a critical role in economic and social development and therefore influence all areas of human endeavour. They also recognized that ICT could become effective instrument to bring about equality in the field of economic growth and development, to narrow disparities between developed and developing countries, and to facilitate access to knowledge and education at all levels of society.

We reaffirm that Declaration today. ICT are central to the emergence of an information- and knowledge-based society and economy in the twenty-first century. The ITC revolution is truly immense and, in conjunction with the basic elements for development, has the potential to accelerate sustainable economic growth, eradicate poverty, promote sustainable development in developing countries, facilitate access to knowledge and education, empower people and local communities to realize their potential and aspirations, build capacities and reinforce informed decision-making. ICT can make a tangible and early difference in the lives of hundreds of millions of people around the world, if they are used to promote the development goals of the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

Our heads of State and Government also expressed their concern that the fact that developing countries have lagged far behind in knowledge generation and that the disparity between developed and developing countries in their capacity to produce scientific and technical knowledge and to utilize that knowledge in support of social and economic development has emerged as one of the major problems facing the international community. However, these are problems that have not yet been dealt with appropriately by the international community.

The deep concern of our leaders has not disappeared. On the contrary, today it is more evident than ever that the huge potential of ICT to advance development is largely eluding most developing countries. As a result, there is a growing digital divide that can become wider every passing day if it is not appropriately and immediately addressed in effective and innovative ways by Governments, multilateral institutions, the donor community, the private sector, civil society and other interested parties.

In the absence of such effective action, there is an urgent need to develop a common vision and adequate international cooperation between developed and developing countries, with the participation of all relevant stakeholders, to ensure, as stated in the Millennium Declaration, that the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication technologies, are available to all. This international cooperation is necessary to allow the information and knowledge revolution to reduce economic inequalities between the peoples, countries and regions of the world. We also believe that it is essential to develop concerted actions at the national, regional and international levels to remove impediments related to lack of infrastructure, local content, training, capacity-building, investment, connectivity, modern technology and an appropriate framework, including further development and implementation of the concepts of electronic government and electronic commerce as helpful tools for the better insertion of developing countries into the world information society.

We are convinced that ICT needs to be considered in the broader context of developing countries' overall priorities and socio-economic structures. Unless there is a common and adequate vision and timely international cooperation to bridge the digital divide, the revolution in information and communication technologies will further marginalize the economies and peoples of the majority of developing countries. That is why international actions are needed to pool resources and exchange experiences which facilitate the integration of developing countries into the new global economy and information society.

Those efforts should be geared towards facilitating access to new technologies on favourable terms, improving market access for exports from the South and enhancing capital and investment flows to developing countries on a sustainable and stable basis. To that end, multilateral development institutions and developed countries should encourage and strengthen, on concessional and preferential terms, both ICT-related investment and transfers that are applicable to local industry in developing countries. Those institutions and countries should also encourage and strengthen education and training, the development of institutional policy and appropriate frameworks, and

support for national programmes in harnessing the potential of ICT for development.

It is in that context that the Group of 77 and China are searching for concrete results in the various international initiatives that have been adopted to enhance the capacity of developing countries in taking advantage of the development opportunities presented by ITC. Those initiatives should generate adequate conditions to move towards creating an international economic environment conducive to development.

We acknowledge the efforts of the Economic and Social Council in giving priority to information and communication technologies for development and in placing ICT at the forefront of the agenda of the United Nations. The adoption of a ministerial declaration during the 2000 high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council reflects the urgent need to find effective and innovative ways to put ICT at the service of development for all.

We welcome the agreed conclusions of the 2001 coordination segment of the Economic and Social Council, which stressed the need to identify ways and means to promote and improve effective access to, and accelerated transfer from developed to developing countries of, knowledge and technology, especially ICT. Technology transfers should be adapted to the particular needs of developing countries and to their development policies, including continuing and non-formal education and distance learning, teacher training, the creation of local content, electronic commerce, telemedicine, the promotion of access to ICT and the provision of better opportunities.

Given the fact that the majority of the world's population is still living in poverty and that many people have thus not yet reaped the full benefits of ICT, the developing world is technologically dependent and vulnerable to the monopolistic pricing of technology and knowledge-based products and services, as well as to the imposition on them of technological solutions that are not appropriate to their specific problems.

In this context, the Group of 77 and China reaffirm the importance of the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force, which was set up in acknowledgement of the widening digital divide between developed and developing countries and the need to narrow it. We support the work that the Task Force has carried out in order to move this critical process forward. Its principal objective is to provide overall leadership to the United Nations in helping to formulate strategies for development, as well as for forging a strategic partnership between the United Nations system, private industry, financing foundations, donors and other relevant stakeholders.

We welcome the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held at Geneva in December 2003 and at Tunis in December 2005. That Summit should develop a clear statement of political will and a concrete plan of action for achieving the goals of the information society. Six themes have been proposed for the Summit: building the necessary infrastructure, opening the gates — achieving universal and equitable access to the information society, services and applications, the needs of users, developing a framework, and ICT and education. These six themes should fully reflect the aspirations of the developing countries with regard to this matter. The agendas and themes to be agreed on during the forthcoming preparatory committees and regional conferences should bring together all the challenges and opportunities of the information society and should reflect the different interests at stake, particularly those of the developing world.

In conclusion, we hope that the Group of Eight's Digital Opportunity Task Force initiative will be of benefit to all developing countries.

I would now like to make a brief statement in my capacity at Vice-Minister for Science and Technology of Venezuela.

During the past two years, Venezuela has been making a major effort to narrow the digital divide. We have raised, in various international forums, the subject of the dangers inherent in the digital divide, while on the domestic front we have made major investments to increase access to the Internet and to improve connectivity at the grass-roots level.

The efforts undertaken by the Venezuelan Government have been supported by the private sector at the national and international levels, and this has made it possible to achieve a substantial increase in access to ICT by all sectors of Venezuelan society. We note, however, that an even wider divide now exists — one that we call the "knowledge divide". We understand that this knowledge divide is related to various factors that extend far beyond digital matters

and include, inter alia, access to and quality of education, health, and productive and competitive capacity.

We had thought that ICT would be a useful way of providing people with a great deal of information that would in turn enable them to move towards development. But we now understand that if we do not use such technologies in a holistic way, incorporating them into the process of knowledge-generation at every stage — diagnosis, information, training, follow-up and so forth — the benefits tend to be lost.

Information and communication technologies provide a basic means of measuring the efforts of the Government in areas such as governance, trade, health and education. At the same time, they make it possible for us to develop more assertive policies in those areas. Through the use of ICT we are now able to assess differences among different cities and regions of the country and to provide individual solutions that ensure the inclusion of each and every Venezuelan in the socio-productive efforts of the country.

For Venezuela, inclusiveness is a fundamental pillar of the process that we call participatory democracy. Inclusiveness should not be something that each country achieves on an individual basis. Rather, as is reflected in the various documents and international agreements in this field, it should be the joint effort of all countries in the quest for the democratization of access to knowledge aimed at the attainment of equality of opportunity for all.

Mr. Nejad Hosseinian (Islamic Republic of Iran): While associating myself with the statement made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, I would like to express, first and foremost, my deep appreciation to you, Mr. President, for your active and engaged stewardship of the work of the General Assembly, and for your comprehensive introductory statement. I commend the valuable and tireless efforts that you and various delegations made during the entire process of informal consultations leading up to this Meeting. I should also like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Secretariat for the excellent preparations for these meetings made over such a short period of time.

This is the third consecutive year in which we have dealt with the role of information and communication technologies (ICT). This time, we are doing so in the General Assembly — the largest universal political body. If nothing else, that fact should make clear the importance of the subject to all of us, developing and developed countries. As the most universal forum, the General Assembly should prepare to evolve a comprehensive response by the international community to the global challenge of ICT with a view to serving development objectives. It is our sincere hope that this Meeting will be able to contribute significantly to the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in Switzerland and Tunisia, by addressing this urgent global issue and by taking a substantive approach to all of the thematic issues of concern to developing countries.

It would be fair to say that a lot of progress has already been made, inter alia, the establishment of the ICT Task Force. We have had the opportunity in the past to present our general views on various aspects of ICT, in particular the growing digital divide. We are concerned that the divide may affect not only countries at different stages of development, but also within the urban and rural areas of individual countries, and that the nature of the problem might also shift from basic to advanced communications, and from one of quantity to one of quality.

I do not intend to repeat positions and analyses that are fully known to the United Nations Members. Instead, my delegation will emphasize some of the elements and aspects that we consider prominent and urgent for our prospective work, as also addressed in various United Nations reports.

The fact that we consider ICT as a key to our strategy for development hardly needs to be emphasized. What is at issue is the role that the United Nations system can and, in fact, should play in this context. Put into very practical terms, the question before us is how to strengthen the development role of the United Nations system and how to enhance the effectiveness of its development activities and its support for national development strategies and programmes by promoting access to and transfer of knowledge and technology. The question of building partnerships on important emerging issues also finds its place within this overall framework.

As in all other areas related to development activities of the United Nations, we are very much concerned that the resources available to the United Nations system for assisting developing countries to

meet the challenges they face in designing the policies and strategies required to bridge the technology gap between the North and the South are simply inadequate. These resources, including official development assistance, need to be expanded. We noted at Monterrey a broad-based political commitment on the issue of financing for development. It is now necessary to move from principles to concrete action and to translate the positive spirit that led to the Monterrey Consensus into meaningful implementation. It is in the spirit of that Conference that the developed countries should try to foster an enabling environment for ICT for development through fulfilling their individual commitments undertaken at the International Conference on Financing for Development.

We are, of course, very appreciative of the commendable efforts of the Economic and Social Council in placing the issue of ICT for development at the forefront of the United Nations agenda and in raising general awareness of its potential in terms of development. However, in our view, it is imperative for the United Nations and related bodies to focus their work on issues related to the transfer of knowledge and technology and to the building of necessary domestic capacities, with a view to promoting the competitiveness of developing countries. No doubt, the ICT Task Force is a good practical step in that direction.

It is now commonly felt that the need for technology transfer arises from the fact that there is a considerable concentration of knowledge, and of technologies deriving therefrom, in a limited number of countries, thus creating economic inequality. To ameliorate, if not to remove, such inequality may require an accelerated transfer of knowledge and technology, especially ICT, to developing countries — and, as everybody knows, on concessional and preferential terms, globally. Further, needless to say, for any transfer to be effective, it should be accompanied by adequate scientific capabilities and infrastructure and should be supported by the proper institutional and legal framework.

Another area of concern for us pertains to the content of, and sound and safe access to, information through ICT. With due respect to the principle of unhindered free access to information, we believe that proper attention should be paid to putting in place an appropriate regulatory and legal framework, at both the national and international levels, for providing and disseminating information over worldwide networks. Privacy needs to be protected; but equally, if not more, important are the boundaries of morality and cultural diversity cherished by different societies around the world.

Within the framework of the developing world's constant grappling and confrontation with new and emerging issues and challenges, we recognize the importance of e-commerce as a new and still unfolding channel for international trade. It is an area with far-reaching implications for our societies and economies, one in which we suffer from fundamental obstacles and shortcomings. Addressing this fact of life in our respective societies cannot be only the beginning of the process. That process should continue and be pursued with an active commitment to removing these obstacles. In this regard, we emphasize that the study process on trade-related aspects of global e-commerce should be continued.

Let me now turn to the question of partnership. As we all know, it was only during the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly that we started dealing with this as a new agenda item, which is exactly why the discussion can still be considered to be in an exploratory stage. I should stress right now that my delegation, as a matter of principle, attaches great importance to the role and participation of stakeholders, including the private sector, in activities to achieve the goals and objectives of the United Nations. Based on that overall premise, we are well disposed and fully prepared to engage actively in a proactive and constructive dialogue with all interested partners on all aspects of this important subject. We caution, however, that any actual progress on forging partnerships should necessarily await the elaboration — and more important, the adoption — by the entire intergovernmental body, of the requisite elements and modalities for the intended and desired partnerships.

With that in mind, my delegation stands ready to contribute to collective intergovernmental endeavours towards building a common vision and realistic approaches to promoting partnerships among all stakeholders for the achievement of digital opportunities for all.

Mr. Gross (United States of America): I will be brief, but I do not want the brevity of my comments to be viewed as inconsistent with our view of the

importance of this meeting and of the topic under discussion. This is a very timely and important dialogue in which we are engaging, on the linkage of information and communication technologies (ICT) to economic development. The issue is now part of a larger global dialogue on how to encourage the use of information-based technologies to meet basic development goals and to thereby promote economic and social opportunities for all the world's inhabitants.

Remarkable strides have been made over the last two decades. For example, access to information technologies has been dramatically increasing around the world, especially in developing countries. The number of mobile telephone subscribers expanded from 491 million in 1999 — an already impressive number — to approximately 950 million by the end of 2001. That is an extraordinary increase in just two years. In addition, we should all note that Internet users in developing countries now comprise almost 20 per cent of all Internet users around the world. As the United Nations Development Programme recently stated,

> "Technology networks are transforming the traditional map of development, expanding people's horizons and creating the potential to realize in a decade progress that required generations in the past." (*Human Development Report 2001*)

Much of that growth is due to people obtaining new and better telecommunications services at much lower prices.

Progress, however, should not be an excuse for complacency. The gap between developed and developing countries persists, and we are convinced that political and economic reforms are crucial if all countries are to reap the benefits of ICT.

Policy makers worldwide recognize that the ICT sector is not only an economic engine but also an enabler of social and political progress. As President Bush said at the World Bank last year, "We have, today, the opportunity to include all the world's poor in an expanding circle of development". The United States is committed to expanding the global circle of prosperity and freedom.

Much work remains to be done in the area of building basic communications infrastructure and having the capacity to use it. How can this be done? A global consensus is emerging around four fundamental principles that form the link between ICT and development: liberalization and competition; commitment to the rule of law; private sector-led innovation; and human capacity-building.

I am encouraged by the extent to which more than 150 countries affirmed those general principles when they approved the Istanbul Plan of Action at the International Telecommunication Union's World Telecommunication Development Conference last March. The commitment to liberalization and competition in the ICT sector opens the door to productivity gains and sustainable wealth creation through increased private investment.

Clearly, the private sector has the flexibility and resources to offer innovative solutions to the unique problems facing developing countries. Governments should look for opportunities to partner with the private sector to make available the benefits of the new technologies. As a recent report of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development indicates, countries that build an environment conducive to private sector investment and that are adaptable to technological innovation experience the greatest benefits of the networked economy. For example, numerous state-of-the-art wireless and Internet protocol-based technologies are being used around the globe to provide communications to rural communities. At the same time, telemedicine applications are improving health care for millions of citizens in remote areas by giving doctors real-time access to critical medical information.

But investment funds will flow into only those economies that establish administrative and commercial institutions based on predictable and transparent rules, especially good governance. Companies, both domestic and foreign, require assurances that regulations are transparent and fair and that contracts will be enforced — in a word, that there is a sound legal basis for commercial investment.

Lastly, investment is broader than simply capital flows. It includes investment in people. ICT training and educational initiatives are the cornerstone of expanded access to and usage of information-based technologies. We are mindful of numerous local, regional and global training initiatives in which users and engineers are taught to create, operate and maintain complex communications networks. Our own

United States Telecommunications Training Institute has provided tuition-free management, policy and technical training for more than 6,000 talented professionals from around the developing world.

We have much to learn from one another. While there is no single template for achieving ICT development, we all agree that the challenge is great and that the opportunities, if we are successful, are of historic dimensions. That is why the President recently announced the Millennium Challenge Account, which is designed to help countries that govern justly to invest in their people and to encourage economic freedom. The United States will seek to support those Governments in developing countries that demonstrate a commitment to the domestic reforms that are necessary for sustained economic growth.

The progress we make will have many stops along the road. The two phases of the World Summit on the Information Society, in which Member States, the private sector and civil society will come together in 2003 and again in 2005, are two important stops on that journey.

We cannot miss this opportunity. This global dialogue is vital to everyone who wants all the world's citizens to enjoy the benefits of the information age.

Mr. Ma Songde (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Today, when science and technology are advancing at astounding speed, information and communication technologies (ICT) have brought tremendous digital opportunities for economic and social development throughout the world. The development of the Internet and of other information infrastructures has made it possible for the information and knowledge necessary for development to spread widely and rapidly. Just as e-commerce has promoted economic globalization, e-government is helping Governments serve the public with greater openness and efficiency.

However, ICT is developing in an unbalanced way. The developed countries are taking full advantage of the immense benefits brought by the digital opportunities, while most developing countries, low-income developing countries in particular, face the ever greater challenges of the digital divide. It is significant that this meeting of the General Assembly devoted to ICT for development is being held against such a backdrop. This meeting offers an opportunity for us to give serious consideration to the question of the digital divide, to exchange views and to seek ways to bridge that divide.

I would like to make three points. First, there are deeply rooted social and economic causes underlying the digital divide. The price barrier for information products and the monopoly of certain technologies and products are major reasons for the ever growing digital divide. In fact, a very few developed countries and their multinational companies, with their powerful economies and expertise, are in control of core technologies in the field of information and communication and are setting the standards and norms in that field. Most developing countries are in danger of being marginalized in the process. Even though the prices of information technology products have been dropping, consumers still need to spend a great deal of money to keep up with the constant upgrades, thus straining the resources of developing countries.

The digital divide has a major impact on the development and stability of the world. Because information technology is a driving force behind the development of economy, education and culture, the digital divide is not only directly related to the gap between the rich and the poor today but will contribute to the widening of that gap in future generations as well, thus nullifying our tremendous efforts for sustainable development.

Secondly, international cooperation is the optimal approach to bridging the digital divide. Developing countries have a vast market potential, a wealth of human resources and low production costs. It is therefore entirely possible — indeed, imperative — to combine the market potential of the developing countries with the technology of the developed countries to jointly promote the spread and application of information technology. The developed countries should assume greater responsibilities and should offer necessary assistance to developing countries in the form of capital, technology and expertise for the construction of their information infrastructure and for the improvement of their domestic capabilities. That will not only be in the interest of the developing countries but will also open up more markets for the developed countries.

At the same time, developing countries should vigorously expand South-South cooperation in information technology, share success stories and draw on one another's experiences. We have noted that the

international community, in particular the United Nations, is undertaking efforts in that regard. The establishment of the United Nations ICT Task Force shows that the Organization is playing a positive and important role in this area.

Thirdly, as a developing country, China has also taken up the daunting challenge of the digital divide, but a sizeable gap exists between China and the developed countries. The fixed-line telephone density rate in China is only 17 per cent, as compared with more than 60 per cent in developed countries. Fully aware of the tremendous and long-term impact that the bridging of the digital divide will have on development and stability, we have increased our investment in information infrastructure under our national development strategy.

At the same time, we are actively engaged in international cooperation within the context of the United Nations. Since 2000, the Shanghai municipal government has for three consecutive years co-sponsored, with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme, the High-Level Forum on City Informatization in the Asia-Pacific Region. The Forum has provided a platform for exchanges of policies and technical cooperation among governmental decision makers at the national and municipal levels and business leaders in the Asia-Pacific region. It also offers case studies, problem-solving plans and project cooperation in order to facilitate the application of information technology.

With the support of the United Nations ICT Task Force, an Asian regional network of the Task Force has been set up in Shanghai by China, India, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum and several dozen other countries, international organizations and enterprises so as to facilitate implementation in Asia of the Task Force's plan of action.

The World Bank's *World Development Report 1998/99* says that knowledge is like light. Weightless and intangible, it can easily travel the world, enlightening the lives of people everywhere. Yet billions of people still live in the darkness of poverty unnecessarily. Although ICT has made possible the transmission of information and knowledge at the speed of light, formidable social, economic and cultural obstacles still exist. Large-scale commercial electricity grids have been operating for nearly 100 years, but one third of the world's people is still without a power supply. The telephone was invented more than a century ago, but more than one third of the world's people have still never made even one telephone call in their lives. The Internet has been in wide use for more than 10 years, but less than 10 per cent of the world's people can afford to log on to it. Science has created a great civilization in which mankind can well take pride, but enormous disparities make it difficult to achieve our lofty ideal of putting science at the service of the entire human race. It is our sincere hope that, through joint efforts by the United Nations, by Governments and by people all around the world, effective action will be taken on a global scale to bridge the knowledge divide, the technology divide and the digital divide.

Mr. Matsunami (Japan) (*spoke in Japanese; English text furnished by the delegation*): It is my pleasure to speak on behalf of the Government of Japan at this meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies (ICT) for development. Since Japan has made efforts to promote international cooperation in the area of ICT, it welcomes this opportunity to deepen the international community's discussion of that subject.

The United Nations first addressed the issue of the digital divide two years ago, when ICT became the theme of the high-level segment of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council. At the United Nations Millennium Summit, held the same year, world leaders agreed to work to ensure that the benefits of new technologies — especially information and communication technologies — were available to all. Today's meeting provides the international community with an important opportunity to pursue that objective. We appreciate the initiative to convene this meeting, taken by the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Han Seung-soo of the Republic of Korea, a country that is at the forefront in this field and that has high rates of subscription to high-speed Internet services.

The development of ICT is said to have brought about the most important structural transformation in the world since the industrial revolution. In fact, this phenomenon has come to be called the information technology revolution. The nations of the world are undertaking efforts to create an information society in which everyone receives the full benefit of ICT and to use those technologies as a basis for development.

The development of ICT is indispensable to prepare for such a society in the twenty-first century, in which information and knowledge will become a source of added value. For that reason, Japan has drastically strengthened its efforts to promote ICT in recent years. Specifically, through the collaboration of the Government and the private sector, it has established an "e-Japan" strategy and is endeavouring to realize a society in which all Japanese people can make the most of information technology.

In addition, ICT enables countries to leapfrog over earlier stages of development. A good example of that is the widespread use of cellular phones: telecommunications can be enhanced without a huge investment in telephone cables and other equipment. Countries can pursue the Millennium Development Goals — such as poverty reduction and improvements in health and education — with more effective policies when they make full use of ICT. Some developing countries have already made substantial strides in that area. In this way, ICT has the potential to contribute significantly to economic and social development.

In reality, however, it is not easy for developing countries to reap the benefits of ICT. There is a danger that those countries will not fully participate in the international information community and economy because they are unable to keep up with rapidly accelerating innovations in ICT. That is especially true when countries cannot meet the conditions of a basic economic and social infrastructure, such as electricity, telecommunications and education. The digital divide could thus result in a further widening of the economic gap between industrialized and developing countries. In order to avoid such a situation, the digital divide must be bridged and society must be transformed so that as many people as possible can benefit from the opportunities provided by such technology and so that ICT can be utilized for development.

From that perspective, Japan is pursuing the international community's common objective of making ICT available to all by tackling the digital divide. Specifically, Japan called on the international community to address this issue by introducing it at the G-8 Kyushu Okinawa Summit in 2000 and proposing the Okinawa Charter on Global Information Society. As a result, the issue of an information society was highlighted on the international agenda. On that occasion, Japan announced that it would prepare a comprehensive cooperation package for bridging the digital divide with public funding. It has implemented cooperation projects amounting to $2.2 billion, emphasizing cooperation with international organizations, including contributions to ICT funds of the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank. Japan will continue to cooperate as much as possible with countries that demonstrate ownership in this area.

In addition, Japan has proposed the Asia Broadband Programme, which aims to establish clear goals to expeditiously create a next-generation, broadband Internet environment through regional cooperation in Asia.

The private sector has taken the lead in developing and disseminating ICT. It is therefore important to make full use of the energy of the private sector in order to use ICT effectively for development. For this purpose, and as a precondition for international cooperation, the developing countries themselves need to establish an environment that is conducive to private sector activities.

In order to facilitate business and attract foreign investment, developing countries need to demonstrate ownership and work to improve the environment for business and investment. As their partners, industrialized countries, international organizations such as the United Nations and the private sector in industrialized countries should strengthen their cooperation to support such efforts by developing countries.

Mr. Utsumi, Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union, has spoken about the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in 2003 and 2005. I think that bridging the digital divide will be an important theme for that Summit, too.

Today's discussion, which is but one of the variety of efforts to bridge the digital divide, contributes to preparations for the Summit. Building upon the discussions that we will have during this meeting, as well as those conducted by the United Nations ICT Task Force and the G-8 Digital Opportunity Task Force, I would like to call on the international community to reaffirm the important role of ICT in development and to redouble its efforts to overcome the digital divide. Japan, for its part, intends to steadily promote cooperation with developing countries.

Mr. Baali (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I should like to express my delegation's satisfaction at the very timely holding of this meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies (ICT) for development.

This meeting provides an ideal opportunity for exchanges of views among Member States, the United Nations system and the other social actors involved on a very high-stakes issue: the bridging of the digital divide, which has compounded the North-South gap, and maximizing the possibilities provided by digital technology in the new information society.

To this end, it seems to us essential to renew the international consensus in order to achieve the objectives of the Millennium Declaration, which aim to make full use of the potential of knowledge and technology and to put it to the service of development. Indeed, technology is now experiencing very rapid progress. Major advances are being registered in the area of information and communication, which almost daily increase the possibilities for considerably speeding up development.

However, the fact that this immense potential is not equally beneficial to all in an equitable manner is likely further to marginalize the economies and populations of the majority of developing countries or to irrevocably exclude them from the benefits and gains of science and technology.

Here we deem it urgent to find effective and innovative means for putting that potential to the service of development for all. In particular, this should involve the identification and elimination of obstacles and those unjustifiable limitations that are hampering the access of developing countries to technology and therefore are the focus of our meeting.

Our Assembly thus is called upon at this meeting to consider all of the relevant issues raised by the advent of an information society and therefore to elaborate a comprehensive vision and a shared interpretation of the objectives and challenges involved.

This is all the more critical given the fact that, at the present time, a considerable number of the inhabitants of our planet are not participating in the information society because of difficulties in accessing information technologies. Even more seriously, other inequalities are emerging daily along with that disparity in access to new information technology, and they are exacerbating existing ones involving income, level of education, vulnerability, and geographical and social isolation.

We must therefore remain vigilant regarding this digital divide, which is continuing to give rise to a new type of exclusion, in particular in the area of access to knowledge.

It is clear that technological knowledge and development are requirements for economic growth and sustainable development. While there is a strong concentration of knowledge and technology in a limited number of countries, the majority of the world's population continues to live in poverty. Many have not benefited in any way from those advantages emanating from the revolution that has taken place in the area of information and communication technologies. As a result, most of the developing countries now face technological dependency and have technologies imposed on them that are not adapted either to their particular problems or to their specific needs.

Information and communication technologies are a pivotal factor in the establishment of a global economy characterized by accelerated growth, sustainable development, the eradication of poverty and better integration of all countries into economic networks.

The pace of globalization depends to a large extent on advances in science and technology. The developing countries should benefit from these advances in an adequate and satisfactory manner, with the assistance of the international community, so that they can obtain the scientific and technological knowledge they need as well as the practical skills and institutional arrangements linked to the management of technology.

Developing countries are aware of the urgent need to strengthen their national capacities in order to make possible the establishment of an appropriate structure for external initiatives aimed at developing the use of information and communication technologies. Algeria believes that this should include the formulation of strategic and sectoral policies in this field, as well as exploring opportunities for introducing and spreading ICT in sectors that can put it into use immediately, such as the trade and health sectors.

The development community and the private sector can support the establishment of specific programmes at the local, national and regional levels to ensure the digital inclusion of the most disadvantaged countries. In this connection, the New Partnership for Africa's Development could serve as a pilot project to bring about such inclusion. The players involved in the establishment of that African initiative have every possible chance to utilize this opportunity to highlight the decisive role of ICT in development.

For their part, the organizations of the United Nations system have a role to play; that of a critical and decisive catalyst with regard to access to technology and technology transfers through the establishment of partnerships likely to contribute to global development in a constructive and meaningful manner. The United Nations in particular must play a leading role to help formulate development strategies for information and communication technologies and to provide the international dimension necessary for efforts to bridge the global digital divide, in order to use digital technologies to realize the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. Yang Seung-tack (Republic of Korea): I am very honoured to be here addressing this meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies (ICT) for development. This meeting could not be timelier, as it brings together the leaders of the world at a time of intense growth in the digital divide. In this respect, I would like to express my gratitude to the President, Han Seung-soo, whose unwavering dedication made this meeting possible. Today, on behalf of the Republic of Korea, I have the privilege to describe to the Assembly the informatization process in Korea.

As some members may well know, Korea has its own share of forlorn memories. As recently as the early 1980s, Korea's penetration rate for fixed-line telephones stood at a mere 7 per cent. That was not surprising in a country that caught the last ride to industrialization and that, consequently, did not have much of an infrastructure. Nevertheless, a common understanding was formed among the Korean people that even though they were late in industrialization, they would not allow themselves to repeat the same mistakes in informatization. With this fervent determination resounding in every corner of Korean society, the Korean Government made an all-out effort to nurture the ICT sector and to digitize the nation.

Today I can say with strong conviction that the effort was not been made in vain. Korea now has the most advanced wired and wireless information communication infrastructure in the world, and has emerged as the global leader in ICT. Korea's fixed-line telephone penetration rate currently stands at over 50 per cent, and 63 per cent of its total population — which amounts to 30 million people — has subscribed to code division multiple access (CDMA) mobile services. But Korea's aim was no longer to follow but to excel. We therefore wasted no time in moving to the next generation of mobile communication technology, an effort that was rewarded in full when Korea became the first country in the world to start the third generation of mobile communication services.

At present, just one and half years since the launch of the service, there are over 7 million mobile Internet subscribers using third-generation services. More than 50 per cent of Koreans now utilize the Internet in their everyday lives, and 8.5 million Korean households are connected to broadband Internet at a minimum of 1 megabit per second. By the end of this year the number of such households is expected to increase even further, to 10 million, which implies that 80 per cent of all households will be connected to the broadband network. In March 2002, the Korean Government declared that broadband Internet service would become a universal service for the Korean people. These facts will permit Korea to be recognized as one of countries to have reached the highest level of informatization.

The significance of Korea's success does not reside solely in the fact that it was achieved in such a short period of time. What is of rather more consequence is that it has provided Korea with extremely fertile soil in which the seeds of knowledge-based industry can be sown. In fact, Korea's ICT industry has been enjoying fertile ground for quite some time and has thus been able to emerge as the main pillar of the Korean economy, accounting for 13 per cent of gross domestic product and 25 per cent of total export volume. At this point, it may be worth mentioning briefly how Korea came to achieve such success.

In 1995 Korea enacted its basic law on informatization promotion; and in 1996 established an informatization promotion fund. In 1997 Korea formed the first inter-ministerial informatization strategy council, which is chaired by the President himself. This

allowed the various agencies and ministries to coordinate their respective informatization policies.

The first success factor was the strong will and clear vision of President Kim Dae-jung and the comprehensive informatization promotion plan that was devised to realize the vision and the will of the President. Furthermore, in 1999 Korea implemented the Cyber-Korea 21 initiative. Korea was thus equipped with the necessary laws, funds, organizations and programmes.

The second success factor was the Internet training programme Korea provided to eliminate the digital divide between socio-economic classes and between regions. Such training of the general population is extremely valuable, as it creates market demand. Therefore, the Korean Government placed great emphasis on creating Internet-friendly classrooms at every level of schooling by connecting to broadband Internet services free of charge. On top of that, Korea offered Internet and computer literacy programmes that targeted 10 million Koreans, including housewives, military personnel, the physically challenged and even inmates in prisons and juvenile correction centres. That resulted in creating a wide base for informatization, thereby generating a huge demand for ICT.

The third factor that contributed to Korea's success was the introduction of competition in the telecommunications market. Due to the competitive market environment, service providers had little choice but to maintain very low telecommunications tariffs. As low tariffs attracted an enormous number of subscribers and created still more demand, a "virtuous circle" in broadband internet services was created.

The fourth factor — and one of the most important — was the development of a human pool and of core information and communication technologies. Korea made an investment not only in technological development but also in human development to prepare for future ICT growth. As the Government and the private sector became united in a common objective, Korea was able to develop and commercialize strategically important information and communication technologies.

As a result of such efforts, Korea was able to take on the world with such market-leading ICT products as CDMA products, memory chips, thin-film transistor liquid crystal displays, broadband Internet and related equipment, satellite transmission equipment and digital television.

I am one of the many fortunate people who had the opportunity to participate in transforming Korea from a poverty-stricken nation to the leader in global ICT. I thus believe that I am in a better position than most to understand the difficulties faced by many nations. I consider it fortunate, therefore, that the United Nations has rolled up its sleeves with a view to tackling this issue. The United Nations has established an ICT Task Force to meet the challenges presented by the growing digital divide. Furthermore, the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society will be held next year. All of these efforts are sure to alleviate some of the problems resulting from the digital divide. I hope in particular that the meetings of the World Summit, to be held in 2003 and 2005, will prove to be fruitful gatherings at which tangible cooperation for addressing the digital divide can be defined.

There must be millions of ways to support developing nations in their struggle for informatization. But in providing such support, we must keep in mind that it is better to teach a hungry person how to catch fish, rather than just to hand him a fish. I believe that the Korean experience could prove to be very useful for nations that are going through the process of informatization. Korea is willing to share its hard-earned know-how and experience with nations in need.

Korea has already taken up the cause of bridging the digital divide. In November 2000, President Kim Dae-jung proposed a special initiative for Asian cooperation in order to resolve digital divide issues, and this has become a guideline in Korea's quest to bridge the digital divide. At the same time, Korea is a founding member of the Development Gateway Foundation, which was established by the World Bank in an effort to close the digital gap.

In addition, since 1991, Korea has trained over 1,500 talented ICT personnel from developing nations as a part of the effort to share the Korean experience and encourage telecommunications expertise in those nations. Since the beginning of the 1990s, Korea has sent 250 information technology experts to 25 countries and, beginning last year, we started dispatching youth volunteers to more than 20 nations in order to teach Internet-use skills. At the same time, Korea has helped to build regional information and

telecommunication centres and has supported various ICT training projects in developing nations through the Korea-Economic Commission for Africa Cooperation Fund and the Korea-Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific Fund.

However, bridging the digital divide is an overwhelming task and cannot be carried out by one country alone. I therefore urge advanced nations and other entities to involve themselves more deeply in that endeavour.

My purpose in coming here will have been more than served if my statement is somehow able to induce the developing nations to hope and the developed nations to act. I have undying faith in the ability and commitment of the United Nations to bridge the digital divide. I wish the Assembly every success.

Organization of work

The President: I should now like to consult members with regard to the need for an additional plenary meeting. Members will recall that, in paragraph 1 of resolution 56/258, the General Assembly decided that the Meeting of the General Assembly would consist of three plenary meetings. In addition, in this connection, I should like to inform Member States that there are still some 55 speakers remaining on the list of speakers. In order for the Assembly to accommodate all of the remaining speakers, I should like to propose that the General Assembly hold an additional plenary meeting tomorrow morning, Tuesday, 18 June 2002, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

I see no objection.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.